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HOW THE EDITORIAL JOB IS CHANGING*

by Harold B. Swanson

Mr. Chairman, Dr. Cowden, members and guests of the American Association of Agricultural College Editors. It is a very great privilege for me, on behalf of our association to accept the greetings and welcome of Michigan State College. I know that all of us are genuinely grateful for the cordial reception and for the fine facilities provided us by this great land-grant college - the oldest and yet one of the most progressive in our Nation today. This combination of long experience and youthful outlook is one that we in our association are constantly seeking and that will serve to inspire us during our stay here this week.

Leonardo da Vinci, the famous inventor and painter and the brilliant thinker who predicted many of our modern inventions, toiled for years fashioning one of the best-known paintings in history, the Mona Lisa. He used all the skill he had acquired throughout the years, and he relied upon the knowledge accumulated by great artists and technicians over the ages. Da Vinci used an artist's brush - not a spray gun - to complete this great work. He spent years, not days, making history.

One of our great Revolutionary heroes, Patrick Henry, once said that he knew of no way of seeing into the future but by looking into the past.

These examples point to the need for hard and painstaking work and for reliance on the lessons of the past in meeting the problems of tomorrow. We must use the experience of others to create an even more important "role" for the agricultural and home economics information worker in the future.

We cannot, however, rely entirely on the past. We must have imagination and initiative to keep abreast with tomorrow in our rapidly changing field.

This morning my remarks are part of a larger presentation in which some of us look into the future. My part is to consider the philosophy of information work and the changing editorial job.

Actually our objectives as information workers change very little. Our job today is the same as it was 40 years ago. We still have the responsibility of disseminating useful information from our land-grant colleges and the USDA.

* Presidential address at the annual meeting of the American Association of Agricultural College Editors, East Lansing, Mich., July 12, 1954.

What has changed are the tools with which we work and the opportunities that come to us. How well we use these tools and avail ourselves of these opportunities will determine how the editorial job will change in the years ahead.

Problems and Challenges

During the past year, great new opportunities and challenges have been placed before us, both as an association and as individual information workers.

First, we have seen the establishment of the National Project in Agricultural Communications - the project geared to improving our professional competence with the resulting greater service to agriculture. The Kellogg Foundation considered the opportunities inherent in our strategic positions and the tools with which we work - mass media - sufficiently promising to merit its support. Our administrators agreed, giving their wholehearted backing and leadership to the project.

Second, as information workers in the land-grant college system and the United States Department of Agriculture, we are an integral, important part of an expanding program in research and education.

Director C. M. Ferguson, of our Federal Extension Service, has described this as a renaissance of faith in research and education. We have always firmly believed that we serve best "by helping others help themselves" - that education and research will pay the largest dividends per dollar of investment the American public (and private industry, too) can make in furthering the welfare of farm people.

Problems such as overflowing granaries, dwindling markets, mounting costs, and the like - serious as they are today - may well be forgotten in the next few decades as a rapidly mounting population places pressure upon a stable and even dwindling supply of good productive land. Only improved methods developed by both private and public research and by practical on-the-farm experience will meet this pressure.

Congress has given research and education an increasingly important part to play in our farm program. Everyone recognizes that they can be only a part of a broad national farm policy - that they cannot provide the entire answer. And we must admit that there are many who are not convinced that education and research are as important as we think.

We as members of larger teams of educators and researchers must do our part in making these expanded extension and research efforts increasingly successful and significant. Not only must we report the progress that is made but also we must provide our fellow workers with tools - the educational aids - that will help them succeed. It will take much more than "ballyhoo" to do the job.

It goes without saying that these are opportunities that we must grasp and must use effectively.

A Rosy Future

Today I look upon AAACE as an organization with a promising future and upon AAACE members as individuals with unlimited opportunities in the years ahead.

First, let's look to the future for AAACE. In the past, under capable leadership and with the wholehearted support of our members and friends, we as an organization have achieved much. We have grown from a small group of pioneer editors to a professional society that merits and has the respect of both our administrators and our fellow workers. We are looked to for leadership, and we deliver. Our members are called upon to advise in agricultural problems, to serve on important committees, to lead in promotional ventures, and to assume many other important responsibilities.

Fortunately these successes haven't dimmed our perspective or dulled our ambition. During the year that I have had the honor of serving as your president I have found that all of you still had the enthusiasm and the new ideas needed to keep our organization moving ahead - that you weren't willing to rest, content with jobs well done in the past. I wish that I could thank every AAACE member, every committee member, and especially every committee chairman personally for their fine efforts this past year.

This success we have had as an organization, however, could also be our great failure. We now have the National Project in Agricultural Communications and many other projects at our disposal. If we fail, either as individuals or as an organization, to reap fully the benefits of these projects and make them work, our standing in land-grant college circles and elsewhere will fall and fall precipitously. I cannot emphasize too strongly the importance of everyone of us supporting the NPAC not only with our ideas but also with our efforts and our time.

Above all let's not depend upon the National Project in Agricultural Communications and others to give us leadership, to direct our thinking, to do our work, and to do the job of professional improvement for us. Actually having this help means that we must work harder and contribute more than ever to the general objectives of our association.

These dangers of success are with us, but I am sure they will never materialize. I feel that we in our field, whether it be in colleges and the USDA or in private industry, are among the most aggressive and forward-looking of all groups and that we will have the vision and the initiative to go ahead.

Guideposts Along the Path

Let's turn, then, to some of the opportunities and challenges and to some of the problems that will face AAACE as an organization. Here are a few, and I know I have overlooked many more.

1. Elevate the standards of our profession. As an organization we can create our own opportunities for further professional improvement.

The possibilities for an increased exchange of ideas through ACE and in other ways are extremely encouraging. When we separated the positions of editor and secretary-treasurer we opened the way to more continuity in ACE editorship. The result will be a better, more professional journal.

In addition, we should and can create means for study and professional improvement within our group. Additional assistantships, scholarships, grants, exchanges, etc., are definite possibilities. The National Project in Agricultural Communications, of course, offers opportunities here, but there are many others. During the past year, for example, the American Plant Food Council has established an award to go each year to an AAACE member for professional improvement. Under the able guidance of Les Schlup, a committee of our members has set standards for similar awards that might come to AAACE.

2. Promote training in the use of mass media. As individuals and as an organization we should exert greater influence in establishing both the need and the methods of providing adequate training in communications. Here I do not mean professional or even college training alone. We know that mass media provide most important tools for county agents, specialists, and research workers, and that competent, trained agents and staff people who understand mass media are necessary to make our agricultural extension and research programs effective.

Consequently, I hope that we can influence our colleges to offer more and better training in communications and self-expression, both on the professional level and as a part of the regular curriculum for undergraduate students, and as special training for staff.

We have many fine schools of journalism and of agriculture which are doing an excellent job in training for our field. Others perhaps do not fully recognize our needs and continue training for the journalism and education of past decades.

3. Sell careers in agricultural and home economics journalism. We, as an organization, can create greater interest and understanding of the field of agricultural and home economics journalism. We should not, as other groups have, take the attitude that we're in - let's limit training and keep out competition to protect ourselves. Vigorous, aggressive, well-trained new personnel lifts any profession, gives it a better standing, and reflects to the benefit of all its members.

We are seeing today vigorous efforts to sell careers in agriculture. Why can't we as an association do something similar in our own specialized field?

4. Inspire public confidence in our system of research and education. Explaining the system in which we work could well be given greater emphasis in our AAACE program.

5. Unite in action with other groups. Our constitution, with a great deal of foresight, lists as one of the objectives of our association, cooperation with other groups. These groups now include NATRFD, AAAE, NFEA, NAEB, our friends in commercial and farm organization work, and many others. Working together we can do much to improve our professional competence, create confidence in educational ideals, and achieve real public relation benefits for agriculture.

I am not suggesting that we unite as one group, losing our identity. Our fellow organizations have some very distinct problems that do not concern us directly. We have problems that are not important to them. However, possibilities for our representatives meeting together and uniting the efforts of all of our associations on certain problems are tremendous. I know that the other associations are greatly interested in doing just this. Let's make it known to them that we welcome the opportunity of working with them even more than in the past.

6. Promote a better understanding of the importance of informational services to rural life and the public on the part of our administrators. Most of our administrators recognize the importance of the informational tools in education and research. Yet that is not enough. We must keep them informed as to how these tools are being used, how they can be made more effective, and how they can be fitted into practically every educational job we have today. Proof of this effectiveness in our own offices could well be augmented by evidence elsewhere provided through AAACE, the USDA, and many other groups.

7. Cooperate in Foreign Information and Exchange Programs. We in America have generally accepted the principle that exchange of technical "know-how" in agriculture is an essential ingredient in our foreign policy. Merely transferring this knowledge from American scientists and specialists to their foreign counterparts is not enough. Our leaders have recognized that this information must be extended to the people on the land. Consequently, this exchange has dealt not only with scientific knowledge but also with the means of communicating this knowledge. It is here where many of our information workers have played an important and effective part.

AAACE could well have a larger and more important part to play in foreign informational exchange programs in the future. Our counterparts abroad are willing and anxious to exchange ideas, professional know-how, etc., with us. Remember we have no monopoly on knowledge in informational techniques. We can and should learn much from our friends abroad. So it seems to me that AAACE could well take the lead in professional exchanges, always being cognizant of the fact that this must be a two-way exchange and not a one-way flow.

8. Promote research in agricultural communications and facilitate the exchange of the results. We all agree that more research in agricultural communications is absolutely essential. Admittedly research in our field lags far behind that of the agricultural sciences whose findings we are communicating.

Much valuable research has been done and is being carried on today. Ironically enough we may have failed to do the thing we are studying - communicate. Much excellent communications research, I am sure, lies buried in obscure tomes collecting dust in our libraries and on the bookshelves of topnotch researchers. The efforts of our Federal Extension Service in keeping us informed about current research is most helpful, but it cannot do the job alone.

We, as an association, cannot do research nor can we attempt to bring together the results of past research. We can, however, point to needed research, help keep that research aimed at practical problems in our field, and from now on inform our fellow members of research results in our own institutions.

Eyes Right

But an association, no matter how effective, cannot do the everyday job on the communications firing line. Let's turn then, to "How the Editorial Job Is Changing," looking once more at the challenges and problems that face us as individuals in the years ahead. Actually the question isn't so much "How is the editorial job changing?" but rather "How can we change the editorial job to meet these challenges?" We have already reviewed some of these challenges, such as the need for more training and research in mass media, in considering the future of AAACE. Here are others.

1. Improve our professional competence. As you will hear later this morning, there are many new and startling developments that will drastically change the media with which we work. Our jobs change everytime a significant innovation comes to the field of communications. The Scango-graver and other new engraving processes, the teletypesetter, the magnetic recorder, new color printing processes, new and faster films, three-dimension equipment, magnetic tape or film that records sound and pictures simultaneously, binaural sound equipment, are only a few of these. These changes, however, are so closely interwoven with our everyday work that it is inconceivable that we will not be fully aware of them and take advantage of their great potentialities.

We all recognize, too, that techniques are only a part of the professional competence we seek. Just as important in our changing job is the need for better understanding of the communication processes, the audiences with which we work, the technical information we handle, etc.

2. Maintain the proper balance between the tools we use. We cannot become so acutely conscious of one particular phase of our work that others are neglected. We cannot adopt such slogans as "All Out for TV," "Parity for Press," "More for the Magazines," "Publications, Standard for the Ages," or "Visualization, the Hope of Education."

All are and will continue to be essential to a well-rounded information program. Let's remember, for example, that back in the 1920's radio was going to eliminate field trips - specialists would now reach right into the home of the farmer and his wife over the air waves. No further contacts would be necessary. You know, too, that radio was going to sound the death knell to press. You know what happened to those predictions.

Now today we may hear the same claims for TV - a revolutionary and extremely effective device, perhaps one of the most powerful we have at our disposal. Let's sell TV, yes, but oversell it, no. Extravagant claims can lead only to undelivered promises.

Upon each of us falls the responsibility of knowing and understanding the place of all tools in a well-rounded information program.

3. Fit our work into the bigger program of our colleges and the USDA. We cannot forget that our job is largely service - service to our fellow workers and to the media outside our institutions. We provide tools for doing the educational job. These tools seldom are called upon to do the entire job. They are used in connection with a much larger kit that educators have at their disposal.

To fit our tools effectively into an educational program, we need to be well informed about the programs with which we work and the subject matter we handle. To do our job we must have the opportunity to hear, understand, and discuss these programs before, not after, they are put into effect.

4. Increase our understanding of related fields. We need better knowledge of psychology, social sciences, and other fields that deal with human behavior and tell us why people act as they do. Perhaps it will fall upon the editorial worker to take leadership in transmitting the knowledge in these fields to fellow workers.

5. Fill the needs and understand the problems of our outlets. We must never fall into the habit of regarding our activities as a "little world by itself" or as "the center of the information world." That habit could be especially damaging to those of us in agricultural colleges and in USDA information work. We may occasionally seem to do this in our relationships with both our colleagues within our institutions and our friends outside of our own immediate circle. Our success in bringing the information we have at our disposal to the people who want it depends largely on indirect contacts through these friends in commercial radio and television, farm trade journals, newspapers, trade associations, and others.

We may have our own magazines, our own radio and television stations, and our own publications. To depend entirely, or even in a large measure, upon them to do our job, however, would be sheer folly.

Recognizing the importance of our colleagues, we must also understand their problems and, if possible, do whatever we can to help solve those problems. If our friends in the commercial field face business failure, loss of time, obstacles to obtaining information, etc., we suffer along with them.

As our editorial job changes I feel that we are and must be coming closer to these allies in the field of agricultural communications.

6. Remember that we are information men, not press agents. If we become personal propagandists for individuals or a particular policy or sheer seekers of appropriations, the taxpayer rightly should complain and regard us as another unnecessary burden on the tax dollar. Neither can we afford to enter "entangling alliances" that put us on one side or another of a political issue, either within or outside our own institution.

There are many important elements in our editorial jobs. There is the need, of course, for publicity for events and for programs; for spot information that will help the reader, viewer, or listener; and for teaching tools such as visual aids and bulletins.

The changing editorial job will not cut our so-called publicity efforts, but it will and should place more and more emphasis on our informational and educational efforts. That, I know, has been the trend over the years, thanks to the farsighted efforts of many of our editorial and administrative leaders.

7. Better understand and sympathize with the problems of agriculture. To be of real service to agriculture, we must be true friends of the farmer and homemaker. This doesn't mean that we fight their political and economic battles for them, but it does mean that we understand and sympathize with their viewpoints and their problems.

In our great zeal to improve ourselves and our techniques we can't become so preoccupied that we forget the direct contact so necessary to understand and work with farm people. We can't brush elbows with farmers in only a casual way, and still expect to maintain the close relationships we need. More, not less, contact will be part of our changing role.

8. Work more closely with our administrators. To do a good information job, we must know and understand the programs our administrators direct and the problems they face. I know that there are widely varying opinions as to the place of the editorial worker in the land-grant college system and USDA. The idea that the editorial worker is an errand boy and personal publicist for the administrator has long ago been discarded. On the other hand, the opposite extreme where the editor expects that the administrator should constantly consult with him as a right-hand man very rightly never has gained great acceptance.

As the role of extension and research work shifts, and our programs change, we, too, must shift our role and our job. For example, what do

the redirection and strengthening of extension work and the increased emphasis on on-the-farm contacts mean to us? They mean that we must give the farm and home planning and resource development a larger place in our mass communications program and that we must develop tools that will help make this redirection successful.

Even with larger county staffs, individual contacts may mean less time for other teaching methods. This is a challenge for us to step in with more effective aid to county workers. With emphasis on individual contacts, mass media may well be called upon to fill some of the gap left in reaching large, broad audiences.

9. Evaluate our work frequently. Without introspection, we tend to continue the same old procedures, adding a bit here and there, but seldom eliminating a job. Careful evaluation of what we've done and what we could have accomplished will help us change our editorial job to meet new problems as they arise. Paul Johnson, my predecessor at Minnesota and now editor of Prairie Farmer, once suggested that perhaps we should be dropping 20 percent of our program each year, clearing the way for new, improved operations.

Closely connected with evaluation is research in agricultural communications.

Most of us do not have the opportunity to do research in our field. However, we can stimulate and point out the need to others in our organizations.

10. Gear our operations to greater effort in marketing and consumer education. The changing emphasis in both research and extension makes it imperative that we learn more about marketing and consumption and retool for greater efforts in these lines. We know how to transmit production techniques effectively. Can we do the same in marketing and in consumer education? It's another of many challenges we must meet in our changing editorial role.

In the gradual evolution of the editorial job over the years, we can lose as well as gain. We can't become so blasé and technique-conscious that we no longer have the enthusiasm, fervor, and devotion to ideals that characterized the still-young pioneers in our field.

Let's Offer "The Best Buy"

We as editorial workers and as an association, have a vital stake in agriculture and in the program of which we are a part. Our changing editorial job and increasingly important role depend on how well we improve on our professional competence, adhere to the principles of self-help and education, and keep ahead of the technical developments of our field. Our programs are financed by the taxpayer's dollars and the taxpayers have a right to expect regular and high dividends on their investment. Let us, in agricultural and home economics information work, by changing our role to meet new challenges and new situations, give them the "best buy" in public service today.



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